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ABSTRACT

The concept of trust and its implications for people working at various levels within school systems are explored. The school administrator is alerted to the elements of bureaucracy that inhibit the development of trust--hierarchy of authority, impersonal relationships and isolation, rules and regulations, close supervision and control, and decision-making practices. Research is cited of the results of a climate of distrust and the effects of a climate of trust. Some specific actions that a leader may take to develop a high trust level in an organization are discussed. (Author/MLF)

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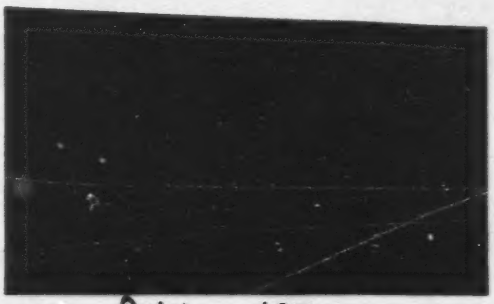
OSSC BULLETIN

TRUST--KEY TO SUCCESSFUL MANAGEMENT

by

Fenton Sharpe



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PREFACE

In February, 1974 the Oregon School Study Council published a Bulletin entitled "Humaneness . . . Essential for Successful Management" which discussed a set of principles through which administrators might become more humane, regardless of management structure. In "Humaneness . . . , " it was stressed that one basic characteristic of the humane manager was not only an ability to trust others, but also their willingness to trust the manager. In this month's Bulletin, Fenton Sharpe carries the theme of trust further, emphasizing it as one of the keys to successful management.

Fenton Sharpe is currently a doctoral student in Educational Administration and a graduate research assistant with the Field Training and Service Bureau, College of Education, University of Oregon. Prior to this, Mr. Sharpe was an Inspector of Schools with the Department of Education in New South Wales, Australia. His responsibilities there included the supervision and assessment of high schools, building administrators and teachers. He also organized inservice courses for teachers and principals, and worked with curriculum development.

This Bulletin should be of interest to all school administrators, to school board members and to any managers who are responsible for working relationships with other people.

Kenneth A. Erickson
Executive Secretary
Oregon School Study Council

TRUST--KEY TO SUCCESSFUL MANAGEMENT

In the OSSC Bulletin on "Humaneness . . . Essential for Successful Management" (February 1974, p. 7), Dr. Ken Erickson wrote:

> The humane manager has those necessary risk-taking qualities which are firmly based on his ability to exhibit genuine trust in human beings. He encourages the people working with him to continue to grow and improve by helping them develop abilities which even they were not sure they originally possessed. Trust is a basic rationale for any activity aimed at improving management.

Many school leaders and managers in other enterprises are convinced that Team Management holds the key to better decision-making and more highly motivated and committed employees. Interpersonal trust and confidence become increasingly vital to the healthy operation of the enterprise when the various members of the Management Team become more vitally involved in the planning and implementing processes, and when the group in interaction, rather than individuals in isolation, becomes the decision-making and problem-solving unit. If the team is to function successfully, each member of the team must be able to rely and depend on each of the others and on the group as a unit.

Our conviction about the fundamental importance of trust in organizational health has been underlined by three recent occurrences:

1. In a discussion on the affairs of one school district, a participant diagnosed the problem in these words: "The trouble with this district is that nobody trusts anyone else. The community doesn't trust the board, the board doesn't trust the superintendent, the superintendent doesn't trust the teachers, and the teachers don't trust the kids."

2. In a workshop on communications, a district administrator said "If we administrators could only learn to trust each other, most of our communication problems would be solved."

3. In examining staff-meeting effectiveness at a different level in another school district, one member commented: "We don't always express our true feelings in meetings because we don't trust each other enough."

In this Bulletin we will explore further the concept of trust, and its implications for people working at various levels within our school systems. In doing so we will try to find answers to these questions:

1. What is TRUST?
2. What are the barriers to TRUST in school organizations?
3. What are the results of a climate of DISTRUST?
4. What are the effects of a climate of TRUST?
5. How can a climate of TRUST be engendered?

1. What Is Trust?

Trust is a dynamic rather than a static thing. It may be recognized only in terms of action. It is an act of willing dependence by one person upon another or a group of others, the taking of a risk in the personal and psychological domain, the willingness to hazard where there is a strong possibility of being hurt.

As a small boy, I remember being taken by my father through a field containing what still seems to me to have been the most monstrous Hereford bull in all the world. My fear getting the better of me, I began to whimper. My father said, "What's the matter, son, don't you trust me?" "I trust you, dad, but I'm still scared of that bull," was my reply as I pulled away from his hand and ran crying to the fence. Where there is no willingness to risk or hazard something personally precious, there is no real trust.

Trust always deals with the future--the unknown. It is based on my perception of how someone else or a group of people will in the future react to my confidence in them or respond to the risk I have taken. There is always some chance that I will be hurt when I exercise trust.

McGregor defines trust as the knowledge that another person "will not deliberately or accidentally, consciously or unconsciously, take unfair advantage of me." (Douglas McGregor, 1967, p. 163)

Deutsch defines trust behaviorally "as consisting of actions that (a) increase one's vulnerability, (b) to another whose behavior is not under one's control, (c) in a situation in which the penalty one may suffer is greater than the possible gain." (Morton Deutsch, 1962, pp. 275-319) An illustration might be the situation in which a school principal gives the authority for a young teacher to supervise some children on a field trip. If the trust proves warranted, the gain will be an extension of the education of a group of children and the further development of a teacher. The risk is that a child might be killed en route and the principal could face severe personal remorse and a serious lawsuit.

The well-known psychoanalyst, Erik Erikson, places the development of trust at the very first stage of human socialization--"the first task of the ego." (Erik Erikson, 1963, p. 249) Trust is an element in every human and social transaction: mailing a letter, writing a check, signing a school board contract, or belonging to a social or task-directed group. It is the adhesive cement which holds people together and prevents them from being isolated individuals.

When trust fails altogether, a group cannot effectively survive. Thus Nicolai Hartman has written:

> All the strength derived from cooperation consists in men's reliance upon one another. . . . It is pre-eminently a communal value; it is the most positive unifying force which welds together a variety of individual persons, with their separate interests, into a collective unit. . . . Distrust breaks all bonds. (N. Hartman as quoted in M. Deutsch, p. 302)

2. What Are the Barriers to Trust in School Organizations?

No matter how progressive they might be, all school organizations exhibit some of the classic elements of bureaucracy, several of which tend to inhibit the development of trust:

(a) Hierarchy of authority

(b) Impersonal relationships and isolation

(c) Rules and regulations

(d) Close supervision and control

(e) Decision-making practices

To elaborate on the above:

(a) Hierarchy of Authority

There is a great deal of evidence that communications passing from level to level in a hierarchy tend to be distorted both by the sender and the receiver. This is particularly true with communications upwards when the receiver has the power of reward and punishment over the sender (e.g., the

receiver may be responsible for supervision, evaluation, and recommendation for advancement). Trust and openness in communications appear to be in a complex cause-and-effect relationship--where there is lack of openness in communication, real trust can never develop, yet where there is lack of trust, communications are likely to be distorted and incomplete. This is why the re-establishment of trust where it has been lost is not a simple nor a short-term task.

(b) Impersonal Relationships and Isolation

Many of our interpersonal dealings in the work-a-day world are on a superficial and impersonal basis. In fact, Weber regarded this as an essential element in the efficient functioning of a large organization. If the development of trust depends to a large extent upon growth of knowledge about the person in whom the trust must be placed, then an emphasis on impersonal communications must inhibit the development of trust.

Many teachers are also separated from their work-mates by a geographical isolation in their classrooms. More than in many other occupations, it is very possible in a school to become so involved in one's own class and room that very little time may be given over to the establishment of close interpersonal relationships. This isolation also works against the development of trust.

(c) Rules and Regulations

Many organizations, including schools and school districts, are almost strangled in a web of rigid rules which regulate almost every action and effectively put a fence around individual initiative and discretion. This is not to be confused with broad statements of policy which free participants to exercise freedom within bounds agreed upon by all. Rigid rules are a sign of distrust. They might be rightfully interpreted by the participants in the organization as an open display by the management of its belief that workers are by nature indolent and incompetent and that personal motivation dwells only in those holding upper administrative positions.

Current trends in teacher employment practices may pose a new threat to trust development in schools. A negotiated contract in which the acceptable behaviors of both manager and employee are specified in detail can have the effect of limiting individual discretion, forcing relationships into legalized, formalized patterns, and discouraging close interpersonal bonds. Consequently, the letter of the law rather than its spirit can become the guideline for action. Barriers between management and employees can thus be strengthened rather than broken down and the trust relationship may suffer.

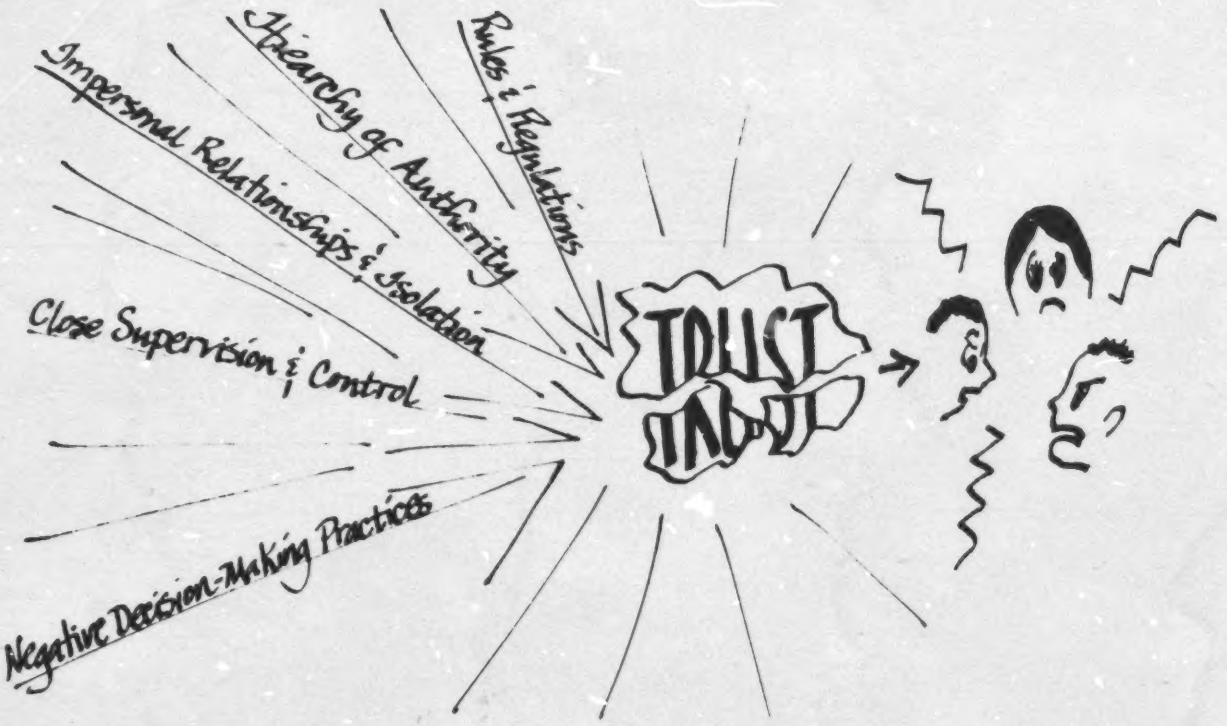
(d) Close Supervision and Control

Close, detailed supervision is a characteristic of some

organizations and a few schools and school districts. Where present, such supervision practices can work against trust in much the same way that restricting regulations do. This is not to suggest that supervision and guidance are no longer necessary in modern organization. Some form of supervision is always a natural concomitant of effective delegation. Delegation implies trust. On the other hand, close, detailed and insistent supervision creates an atmosphere of distrust and can lead to loss of initiative and strained relationships.

(e) Decision-making Practices

In the classic bureaucracy, all major decisions were the preserve of the top levels in the organizations. These decisions would be disseminated downwards to the workers through the chain of command in the form of instructions. The implication is that wisdom resides inherently in those occupying positions of authority, while the ordinary participants in the enterprise cannot be trusted to exercise responsibility for policy- or decision-making. In this bureaucratic model, problems tend to be solved and decisions made by individuals rather than by group consensus. Where this pattern predominates, there is a growth of isolationism, a lack of close human interaction and a resulting lack of trust.



Few school organizations today display all, or even any, of these classic attributes of Weber's ideal-type bureaucracy in their extreme form. On the other hand, all organizations with hierarchies of authority contain within their structures several dynamic forces which work constantly against the establishment of close interpersonal relationships and the development of trust. The point in listing them in their extreme form is to alert the school administrator to the fact that a constant and concerted effort must be made to minimize these negative forces inherent in human organizations if trust is to be developed and maintained. Trust and complex organizations are <u>not</u> incompatible if the participants are genuinely interested in each other's welfare and desire to cooperate towards the achievement of common goals.

3. What Are the Results of a Climate of Distrust?

Research evidence points to the following undesirable outcomes associated with a climate of distrust:

(a) individual defensiveness in social relationships (Gibb, 1961)

(b) difficulty in concentrating on the content of communications, resulting in distortions of understanding (Gibb, 1961)

(c) lack of accuracy in perceiving the motives and values of others (Gibb, 1961)

(d) decreased ability to recognize and accept good ideas (Parloff and Handlon, 1966)

(e) inhibited problem-solving effectiveness (Meadow, 1959)

(f) slower intellectual development (Rogers, 1961)

(g) less originality of thought (Rogers, 1961)

(h) emotional instability (Rogers, 1961)

(i) less self-control (Rogers, 1961)

(j) self-justification in the presence of others (Gibb, 1967)

(k) attempts to force others to conform (Gibb, 1967)

(l) avoidance of feeling and conflict (Gibb, 1967)

(m) social distance and formality (Gibb, 1967)

(n) rigid control (Gibb, 1967)

(o) fear of controversy (Gibb, 1967)

(p) flattery (Gibb, 1967)

(q) cynicism about human nature (Gibb, 1967)

(r) inhibited personal and group growth (Gibb, 1967)

The relationship between trust and communication processes has received the greatest attention. Mellinger (1956) has demonstrated that distrust is related directly to distortion in upward communications within an organization. Such distortions are likely to take three forms: withdrawal (vagueness and evasiveness), compliance (minimizing actual disagreement), and aggressiveness (exaggerating disagreement). One interesting sidelight to Mellinger's study was the discovery that there were almost as many distortions in "downwards" communications as in "upwards" communications in a climate of low trust.

William Read (1966) related accuracy of communication to the level of upward mobility of the "lower" level participant, his perception of the superordinate's power over his career,

and the level of trust in the relationship. It is interesting to note that although the effect of trust was hypothesized initially to be a minor factor only, it proved to be most decisive in determining the accuracy of communications. (W. Read, 1966)

4. What Are the Effects of a Climate of Trust?

Research has also demonstrated the positive power of trust in human interaction.

(a) Trust is a salient factor in determining the effectiveness of many relationships such as those between parent and child (Baldwin, et. al, 1945), psychotherapist and client (Fiedler, 1953; Seeman, 1954), and members of problem-solving groups (Parloff and Handlon, 1966).

(b) It facilitates interpersonal acceptance and openness of expression. (Gibb, 1961)

(c) It is related to rapid intellectual development, increased emotional stability, and increased self-control. (Rogers, 1961)

(d) It increases problem-solving effectiveness because problem-solving groups with high trust will:

(i) exchange relevant feelings and ideas more openly

(ii) develop greater clarification of goals and problems

(iii) search more extensively for alternative courses of action

(iv) have greater influence on solutions

(v) be more satisfied with their problem-solving efforts

(vi) have greater motivation to influence conclusions

(vii) see themselves as a closer group and more of a team

(viii) have less desire to leave the group and join another. (D. E. Zand, 1972)

(e) It leads to greater accuracy, completeness and honesty in communications. (Mellinger, 1956)

The implications of all of the research seem clear. If our schools and school districts are to be healthy, on-going organizations, achieving their tasks efficiently and fostering maximum personal growth in their members, and if at the same time there is to be a spirit of cooperation and a sense of teamwork in the total educational family (community,

parents, administrators, teachers and pupils), if conflicts are to be kept to a minimum and emerging problems effectively solved, then every effort must be made to establish and maintain a high level of interpersonal and intergroup trust.

This is by no means an easy task. Schmuck rightly observes that while "it is not hard to conceive the meaning of trust, it is difficult to achieve the quality itself in interpersonal relations." (Schmuck, 1972, p. 37) McGregor echoes this: "Trust is a delicate property of human relationships. It is influenced far more by actions than by words. It takes a long time to build, but it can be destroyed very quickly. Even a single action--perhaps misunderstood--can have powerful negative effects. It is the perception of the other person and of his actions, not the objective reality, on which the trust is based. And such perceptions are profoundly influenced by emotions: needs, anxieties, guilts, expectations, hopes." (McGregor, 1967, p. 163)

5. How Can a Climate of Trust Be Engendered?

Changes in the trust level of an organization are almost invariably brought about by the attitudes and actions of the leader himself. If a low level of confidence pervades the climate of the organization, it is to himself that the leader should look for the cause rather than to the behavior and attitudes of his subordinates. Rarely can the total

relational atmosphere within a working group be radically influenced by the subordinate members within it. The key lies in the leader's ability and willingness to recognize the need for change and to take those steps, no matter how difficult, humbling or personally hazardous they may be, which will raise the total trust level within the group.

It is to a consideration of some <u>specific actions</u> which a leader may take to develop a high trust level in his organization that we now turn.

<u>(a) The leader must prove himself to be trustworthy, i.e., worthy of trust.</u>

The members of a working group will come to perceive the leader as worthy of trust by the interaction of three processes:

* By the exercise of an initial and tentative kind of trust in the leader simply because of his authority position and not because of his personal qualities. This kind of blind faith in the system and in legitimate authority is very rare today (having suffered almost fatal blows at a higher national level) and where it does exist, it is easily destroyed by unsatisfactory experiences. The educational administrator ought not to rely too long on the power of his position for the maintenance of trust.

* Through reputation, passed on by word of mouth from the experiences of others. "He's a good guy." "You can trust him." etc.

* By personal experience through a tentative process of exercising a little trust in matters of increasing personal importance. In this sense, the establishment of trust is a kind of conditioning process--there is an exercise of a small amount of trust, the trust is not betrayed, so there is a willingness to hazard more of oneself in the future.

This kind of trustworthiness will be based on the following attributes:

(i) The leader's honesty and authenticity. The leader must be proved to be a person of his/her word, straightforward, not devious or "loose" with the truth; he/she must be seen to be authentic, real, "true-blue" or "fair-dinkum" (as Australians would say), genuine in his/her expression of feelings and attitudes, if he/she is to earn the trust of others. Counterfeit expressions of concern for or belief in others, half-truths in evaluative discussions followed later by the whole truth in written reports--these are the kinds of actions which rapidly destroy proffered trust.

(ii) The leader's consistency. Inconsistency is incompatible with trust. Many of us have worked under someone who

is a "will-o'-the-wisp." He/she agrees with everyone who puts up a reasonable case, even if his/her various stances are contradictory. Today he/she plays the unreasonably tough supervisor, tomorrow the "buddy-buddy" pal.

To be consistent does not imply rigidity, pig-headedness, the unwillingness to see one's mistakes and change accordingly. It is related to honesty and openness. Where change of attitude and approach are necessary, the reasons should be quickly conveyed to all those affected by the change. Thus flexibility and consistency are like two sides of the one coin--different but not mutually exclusive.

(iii) Ability to keep confidences. Many people have experienced the situation in which we have told someone (particularly a superior in an organization) something immensely personal in a confidential situation, only to find that others come to know of it. To spread such confidences is to destroy trust.

(iv) Supportiveness--willingness to accept mistakes. When the leader delegates a task to another and gives him the wherewithal and guidance to do that task, the leader must be open to the realization that the task may be done differently from the way in which he would have done it, and that a mistake may be made in carrying it out. If the leader can tolerate ambiguity, and if, when mistakes are made, he is supportive, if he shares the responsibility for the mistake

with his subordinate and regards it as a mutual learning experience, then this represents a demonstration of supportiveness which tends to contribute to the development of reciprocal trust.

(v) Openness of communications. The feeling that "they're not telling me everything--" or "there's more to this than meets the eye," is also damaging to trust.

One principal likes to raise the ire of his unpopular librarian by walking into the library with a tape measure when the devilish mood takes him, and proceeding to make flourishing measurements, mumbling things like--"Mm, it should fit there. . . . We'll have no trouble rearranging this," etc. The librarian's anxiety level rises appreciably when to her questions he merely replies: "Oh, don't worry, Miss X, everything will be all right."

Everyone doesn't need to know everything in a school district (this leads to data-overload), but people do need and want to know all of the facts relevant to their particular task in the scheme of things. An atmosphere of evasiveness, lack of openness, incompleteness of communications is conducive to anxiety and distrust.

(vi) Ability to do the job. When the leader is found regularly to be short on the ability to perform his given task, trust will be undermined. If the Peter Principle operates in educational organizations, it follows that many

people are trying to operate beyond the level of their ability. One needs to make a realistic assessment of one's own capabilities and performance as well as to solicit the evaluations of others in order to determine if lack of trust stems simply from the perception of others that the job is outside of his/her abilities or expertise. The solution might then be a program of self-development in the necessary areas of expertise or a move as soon as possible into a more suitable position.

(b) The leader must exercise trust himself/herself

All of the foregoing suggestions have dealt with the leader's establishing his/her own trustworthiness. They are extremely important, but no more so than the result if the leader displays genuine trust in the members of his work group.

Authenticity is paramount. Counterfeit displays of "trust" will soon be seen for what they are, and deepened distrust rather than heightened trust will be the reaction of the group. Genuine trust springs from a belief in the goodness of human nature, that people can be motivated by the desire to make a useful contribution to a worthwhile cause, that work can be rewarding in itself, that people respond to humaneness, concern and trust.

This belief is demonstrated whenever a leader:

* delegates an important task to a subordinate supportively and without extreme forms of control and stifling

supervision. (This does not mean abdicating responsibility or exercising laissez-faire forms of "leadership.")

* operates with rules and regulations which act as boundaries within which discretion may be used.

* manages through processes of collaboration, team policy-making and problem-solving, allowing for active involvement throughout the organization in the making of decisions which affect the various members.

* demonstrates supportiveness in human relations and the willingness to accept and share the consequences of the mistakes through which experience is gained and learning effected.

Trust is also fostered when a leader:

* really understands himself/herself.

* is willing to admit his/her own mistakes or shortcomings to the members of his/her work team.

* refuses to appeal to his/her legitimate authority to achieve his/her purposes.

* expresses his/her true feelings regardless of the personal cost.

* is not afraid to reveal himself/herself as a real person with the same fears and doubts and hopes and joys as anyone else.

The leader knows that someone may take advantage of his/her openness, that there may be misunderstandings or misinterpretations of his/her words or actions which could rebound against him/her, but he/she believes that this is a risk well worth the taking for the advantages to be gained through the establishment of genuine mutual trust.

In this kind of climate the leader can confidently expect:

* more open communications

* fewer misconstrued communications
* stronger motivation
* fewer conflicts
* better industrial relations
* happier and more contented workers
* higher group morale
* fewer absentees
* better decisions resulting from broader and more honest inputs
* better goal-setting and problem-solving
* personal and group growth
* more openness to innovation and creativity
* more authentic and rewarding interpersonal relations
* ultimate savings in time and money
* better results.

The leader will find that trust is well worth striving for!

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